

PZ
3

S9643
①

FT MEADE
GenColl





THE OLD, OLD STORY

210
R.P.

THE OLD, OLD STORY

(ONLY DIFFERENTLY TREATED)

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"THE LEGEND OF LOVE"

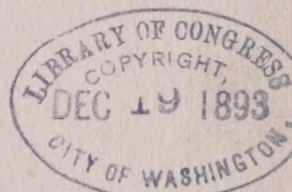


Howard
✓
Sutherland

PRIVATELY PRINTED

SAN FRANCISCO

1893



561774

P


PZ 3.
. S9643
①

COPYRIGHT, 1893,
BY
C. A. MURDOCK & Co.

San Francisco

THE OLD, OLD STORY.

CHAPTER I.

NCE upon a time, in a village situated on one of the fairest islands in the Mediterranean, there lived a fisherman, with his son and adopted daughter.

The fisherman, who was known by the name of Telmyk, was a rugged old man of seventy winters, or more. His muscles were as strong as the limbs of the oak, and his heart was as tender as the creepers twining around its base.

Every morning, before dawn, he put forth to sea and fished until the sun was high in the heavens; then he returned landwards and sold in the market-place enough for the daily wants of his family, and gave what was over to the poor.

Every one in the market-place knew him. They remembered how, many years before, he had married the fairest maiden of the

village; and four years afterwards had followed her flower-covered body to the Grove of Palms, where it was burned, and the ashes thrown to the winds of heaven. And since that day, they noticed that he seldom mingled with men,—only grew kinder at heart, and more resigned.

His son, Korlyan, was a shepherd. When not otherwise employed, he would sit in the temple of the Spirit of Universal Beauty (where the islanders worshipped in those days), dreaming about all sorts of things, and more especially about the statue of the Goddess of Beauty, which stood at the far end of the temple.

Silent she stood, and ever lovely. Her arms were stretched out in entreaty, or in consolation; and about her mouth hovered a faint smile of pity — possibly of scorn. Korlyan never quite knew what her expression meant; that is why she had such great power over him.

When the sun shone through the windows, great crimson stains would appear upon her body; but at night-time she appeared very pure again,—and very terrible.

Memelle—the little waif whom the fisher-

man had adopted—was deformed and blind. She was very beautiful, in spite of her great misfortune. Everybody loved her. When the children asked her where her eyes were, she replied that they had been left amongst the stars, where she would some day go to seek them.

And the little children looked at one another, and wondered if that was really where their own eyes came from.

She had heard Korlyan speak about the strange beauty of the statue, and noticed that he became very despondent when doing so. Thus, she found out that the boy loved the goddess, and pitied him very much; for, in her silent way, she had loved him for many years. There was no one in whom she could confide, and so she just tried to forget. But one does not do that so easily.

The boy suffered differently. He sat for hours at a time in the temple, forgetful finally of his duties, and all-absorbed in the contemplation of his ideal. When it became too dark to see her, he went home and brooded in silence, until his heart grew bitter within him. And the Spirit of Evil—whose disappointment in love is the earliest and most tragic

case we have on record, and to whom life is ever decidedly dull and commonplace,—took a lazy sort of interest in their love affairs.

* * * * *

One evening Korlyan took his father's boat, and went fishing.

The sea was very quiet, and the air very sultry; so he very soon grew tired, and forgot all about the fish, and everything else.

Presently he heard a noise, as of rushing winds overhead. Looking up, he saw a great white bird being attacked by another of blood-red hue. The white bird held something in each of its claws, and could not defend itself; so the other had no difficulty in gaining the mastery. But the white bird, opening its claws, let their contents fall into the sea. The other, swooping downwards, sought to catch them, but was too late; they sank beneath the waves, and the red bird, shrieking with rage, killed its weakened adversary, and then flew away towards the north. The boy leaned over the side of the boat, and saw two white things upon the golden sands. Taking off his clothes, he dived to the bottom, picked them

up, and returned to the boat, where he found them to be pearls of great beauty.

Looking over them carefully, he found the word "*Truth*" engraven upon the one, and upon the other, "*For the Fairest.*" Delighted over his treasures, he hastened home, and, telling nobody what had occurred, he hid them in his room until the morrow should come. But, when the morrow came, he was anxious, having grown thoughtful over night. He began to wonder what they betokened, and whence they came. He only remembered that the white bird came from the east.

At the hour of noon, when all the worshippers had gone to lunch, he went to the temple, and laid the pearls before the statue. The Pearl of Truth lost all its lustre, and looked like a common stone. Then the boy took the other one, and hung it upon her breast—but the beauty of the statue seemed to fade before its flawless splendor.

The return of a worshipper—who, in his excitement to get to lunch, had forgotten his slippers,—caused the boy to snatch off the pearl and hurry away from the statue; but when the intruder had once more departed, he crept towards it again and replaced the

ornament. It was all of no use; the one pearl lost all its lustre when near her, and the beauty of the other so outshone that of the goddess that the boy very petulantly put out his tongue at her, and walked away.

Knowing not what to do with the pearls, he shut himself up in his room, and would speak to no one,—not even to sweet Memelle, who came often to his door, and leaned her forehead against it wearily, waiting for him to come out. He heeded her not, but sat brooding in solitude. And very soon his soul grew bitter within him. For that is the way with souls.


Presently, out of the silence, a gentle voice arose and spoke to him, saying:

“O youth! why art thou so unhappy? Is it because of thy two pearls? Why goest thou not unto thy Creator, seeing that He fashioned thee, to demand of Him the temple of the one and the rightful owner of the other? He may tell thee that there are other temples than that of beauty; and may lead thee to one who is worthier of homage than the one who reigns within it. Arise, O despondent one, and pass with the sun from the windows of the east unto the portals of

the west; then, if thy search be diligent, thou shalt find thy quest, and return comforted."

The youth, knowing not that the Spirit of Evil thus spoke to him through the medium of his own soul, placed his two pearls in a velvet satchel, and taking a bunch of prim-roses to guide his steps, left the house quietly before the inmates were stirring.

CHAPTER II.

HE departure of Korlyan was noticed by only one person—the High Priest Tozrym. It was his custom before entering the Temple of a morning, to promenade upon his housetop, to the infinite disgust of the cats, whose fervor—judging by the quantity and quality of their hymns—was only equalled by that of the disestablished denominations of the day. Not that the music of the cats annoyed him—by no means; for, being High Priest of the temple of the Spirit of Universal Beauty, his soul was in perfect harmony with theirs; and, by coming amongst them in all the poetry of the morning hour, he sought to tell them of it. But the cats were very proud, and held aloof from him.

Standing thus in an attitude of contemplation, he saw, passing beneath him, the fisherman's son. He watched the boy become a black speck upon the golden desert, and finally disappear in the distance; then, with an anxious look at the rising sun, he hastened

to the temple to perform his accustomed duties.

Carefully he dusted the goddess, thinking sadly the while of his lawful but unlovely spouse, who yet lay beneath the bedclothes, and whose spirituality had of late become so grossly material. With a groan, he turned to depart, but found, standing before him, the fisherman Telmyk, with arms outstretched, and hair all rough and tumbled.

“O Tozrym,” the old man cried, “hast thou seen aught of my wayward son? For this morning, upon entering his chamber, we found it deserted. He is not in the village; neither has he gone upon the waters,—for my boat is still anchored in the bay. Some days ago he showed me two marvellous pearls, which—so he said—were to dispel all sorrow from the world and his hungry heart. But their possession made him unhappy; for he brooded in solitude over their possession, eating not, and drinking not, and shunning even our Memelle. And now that he has gone from us, she sits weeping in his chamber, like a ring-dove in the nest of its absent mate.”

Then the High Priest, being a truthful man,

and one who stood within the shadow of the Spirit, answered:

"I have not seen him."

But in his heart, he wondered greatly about the two pearls, and dim forebodings came to him of an unhappy and dishonored old age, dragged out in penury, far from the sacred precincts of the temple.

* * * * *

That evening, as Korlyan did not appear, special services were held to invoke the aid of the goddess in his behalf.

At an early hour the elders assembled and sat in the front seats, leaving the uncushioned back ones for their spouses and the uninitiated in general. Strange perfumes began to fill the building; and presently, to the tremulous notes of harps and mellow flutes, a questionable quartette, consisting of a long and lugubrious basso, a fat and sawed-off little tenor, and two real ladies—whose only fault was their inability to sing—pirouetted before the congregation, and warbled softly. When the fervor of the worshippers had reached its highest point, the High Priest Tozrym struck

three times upon a gong of purest crystal, whereupon a score of diaphanously clad dancing girls came—from Heaven only knows where—and danced with Doric majesty along the aisles. To their graceful movements the congregation kept time with their arms and heads, and all behaved properly, except the Village Pessimist, who so far forgot his adopted philosophy as to join in the dance, and so get forcibly ejected.

When the dancers had passed twice around the aisles, a jackass of discreet years and modest appearance was introduced, and formally sacrificed. The collection was then taken up, and after it had been safely deposited with the High Priest (who was also a bank president), he told them that the fate of the missing youth was still uncertain; but, in consideration of the bountiful offering, he would dispense with the customary exhortation.

The sighs of relief, which this announcement brought forth, were so general, that the lights were extinguished; and, in the general rush to get out, three men and the High Priest were killed.


* * * * *

Some hours afterwards, when the moon was very high in the heavens, Memelle entered the temple, and groped her way up to the statue.

At first, she seemed afraid to touch it; but after a while she summoned up her courage, and passed her hand slowly all over it. The rounded limbs, full hips, and beautifully moulded bosom seemed to disdain her; and when at last she reached the face, and traced out its cruel smile, she sighed and turned away to an open window.

The ceaseless crash of the waves upon the beach, and the song of a lonely bird, hinted to her of the fatality and futility of existence. She was only a little girl, so could not understand why such things must be; and very soon the sigh became a sob. She hurriedly drew her shawl closely about her head, lest the silent statue might hear her and laugh, and then went back to the cottage.

CHAPTER III.

N the eve of the thirteenth day Korlyan arrived, weary and low-spirited, at the porch of Paradise. He sat upon the lowest step, and looked wistfully upward at the great door of brass and the high walls of white marble, which extended as far as he could see—guarding the domains of the happy from the outer world.

Presently he arose, and slowly climbing the many steps, knocked gently at the door. Nobody seemed to hear him, and so he knocked again—somewhat louder. As no one came, he sat down by the porch and waited. And after a while the Spirit of Evil entered him, and made him beat upon the door again—this time with great force, till all space resounded with the voices of muttered thunders:

“Thou fool! to think that the hardship of thy pilgrimage will open for thee the Gate of Supposed Happiness! What art thou in the great system of worlds, that He should

change thy lot before that of any other? When thou standest in the presence of God, who of all womanhood will step forward and say: 'This man was true; he is worthy of the Garment'? Who of the needy will step forward and say: 'This man gave me of his love and his riches; he is worthy of Thy mercy'? Who of the spiritually blind will step forward and say: 'This man gave me of his own light; he is worthy of Thy companionship'? Is it not likelier that thou shalt stand solitary among the blessed, as thou didst upon earth, and shalt be doomed to eternities of further striving before partaking of that joy?"

But the youth heard not the warnings. He continued beating at the door with hands much bruised and bleeding, and the thunder tones continued:

"Back to thy den, thou fool! What right hast thou to demand the reward of the well-tried? Return to thy cherished solitude, and woo, with bitter heart, thy mocking self—harsh grown, and deaf to the heart-beats of the many. Art worthy thou of immortality—thou to whom even the hour of trial was oppressive? Deservest thou the Garment and

the Torch—thou, whose earthly ideal was sensuous, and whose sight was wilfully blind? Beware how thou cravest admittance; for to enter here at all—save through the purgatory of unfulfilled desire—is only to tread anew the thorny path and lone!”

Then the youth, grown frightened at the continuous murmurs, which at last he began to comprehend, ceased beating against the brazen portal, and crouched within a corner of the porch, weeping bitterly.

One by one his tears fell into space, and became stars. But he noticed them not, for he was watching the young flowers spring up in the gardens; and when the wind began its evening song he fell fast asleep.

Shortly afterwards the door opened, and the Queen of Heaven—radiant in majesty, tender in the consciousness of motherhood, and divinely sad in knowledge of the ever-recurring world tragedy,—came forth to bless the Earth. With her were twelve maidens, clothed in soft, clinging gowns, old-gold, pearl-gray, and crimson-hued.

The white walls of heaven reflected the glowing hues; and, far away in space, upon the drowsy old Earth, the labor-worn toilers

of the fields stood still a while to greet the sacred sight with prayers.

One of the maidens noticed the sleeping youth, and pointed him out to the Blessed Mother. She looked at him sadly for a time, and then told the girls to leave her alone with him. One by one they passed behind the great portal into the light within; and when they had all gone a soft darkness fell over everything.

Then the Mother sat down beside the child, and drew him upon her breast. He ceased weeping, and said, as one speaks in dreams: "If only the door would open! I have wandered so long; and they told me that everything would be granted me here. Oh, teach me the hiding-places of Truth and of Beauty; for my pearls are becoming dim, and may lose all their wonderful lustre if thus I return to the world."

"My child," answered the Mother, "you have done wrong in coming here to find your quest. The Spirit of Truth and of Beauty is universal, and is to be found everywhere where the presence of the Father is. Not only here, but even in the darkest corners of your orb it exists,—hidden, perhaps; but ever ready to

spring up and lighten the pathway of the benighted wanderer. In the body of the lowest of His creatures burns the truth as brightly as in the purest of the spirit-essences which minister in heaven. In the heart of the humblest woman is a beauty as transcendent and lasting as that which passes each morning with me into the Holy of Holies."

The boy looked curiously at the calm, beautiful woman in whose arms he lay cradled, and asked her who she was, and whether she had ever been unhappy.

And the Mother smiled tenderly, and said:

"My child, I am the Queen of Heaven. I sit beside the Throne at the judgment of the awakened, to plead for those who sinned unconsciously. I watch the souls of the uncharitable—heavy-laden with golden ore—sink in the balances to the earth they loved so much; while the souls of the poor—sealed with the marks of sacred poverty—rise upwards into eternal light. I am she whose heart Fate has made the storage-place of old-world griefs, and whose bosom must be the home of countless myriads of the unhappy, denied the sacred companionship and love which may fall to the lot of other men. Sad memories of the

past, and sadder forebodings of the future, make in my heart their hiding-places; and though the chambers are full, yet the guests keep ever arriving, and must be taken in. Now and then, rays of hope steal through the silent fane, and leave therein the promise of greater happiness. But the memories of the lost stay with me for ever and ever."

The boy thought a while, and then asked if every one would not be happier if sorrow were unknown; to which the Mother answered:

"My child, it is only through sorrow that man can attain to perfection. With the cessation of sorrow would come the end of all spiritual endeavor. The babe cries until the mother soothes it to sleep; the dreamer grasps for the fleeting ideal before him, and stumbles, by stages of divine inspiration, up the rugged hill of life; and the heart-broken and lonely woman, grown weary of the bitter fight, offers the remnant of her heart to God and the world, knowing that her soul is in His keeping, and that He will understand."

"But, down there," the boy said wearily, pointing to the world, "each one will have the truth to be just that which he individually believes. They clamor and fight in the

darkness, and so I got away from them. But, what I seek does not seem to be here at all."

"And they are right," said the Queen Mother. "The world is not yet old enough to speak one universal tongue. Do you not remember how the peasants on a Sabbath each pull a separate rope, that from the belfry of the church may issue the melody of a perfect peal? Even so do the different creeds proclaim the one Father, whose beauty goes forth with the earliest rays of the sunlight!"

Speaking thus, she kissed him, and then passed behind the great gates.

The boy seemed not to notice her absence. He sat looking silently into space.

Presently he became dizzy; strange lights danced before his eyes; a wheel began to revolve in the center of his head, and, finally, seemed to absorb his entire being, and after striving in vain to retain the mastery over his thoughts, he became entirely unconscious of all things.

CHAPTER IV.

AFTER leaving the High Priest, the old fisherman took a staff and some provisions, and went forth into the desert. He had not travelled very far when he met his son, proceeding leisurely homewards, and singing strange songs.

The boy did not recognize his father. His senses had left him,—he was become as a broken shell, wherein the whisperings of the sea are mute or unmelodious. He permitted the old man to kiss him and lead him slowly towards the city. Meanwhile, with broken voice and staring eyes, he sang:

“Jingle, jangle! ring the bell,
Toiling peasants sound the knell,
Dooming every soul to hell.
Jingle, jangle,
Dong!

“See the weighted balance turn!
Jingle, jangle,—there, go burn!
Blessed Mary, still I yearn.
Jingle, jangle,
Dong!”

Having finished his song, the boy laughed

loudly, and swayed his hands to and fro, as though he were ringing a chime. The old fisherman prayed continually, and was very glad when finally the walls of the city rose up before them.

The boy showed a dislike to passing within the gates; but, after some coaxing, his father got him inside, and led him to their home.

When Memelle came to watch over him through the night, the boy pointed to her little crooked back, and began to laugh immoderately again; but the sweet white face of the girl soothed him, and he began to sing again:

“Far away in twilight lands,
Near the Gate of Heaven,
Torch in hand, my loved one stands,
Till my gloom be riven.

“Stands she there and nightly sings
Songs of wondrous sweetness,
Till within my heart there rings
Echo of completeness.

“Wait we then, O weary soul,
Soon will dawn the morrow,
When, with her, we seek the goal—
Free from every sorrow.”

Memelle sat down beside him, stroked his thin hands and face, and wondered if love

and pain always went together. Presently her head drooped upon the pillow, and she fell asleep.

Korlyan looked at her for a while, and very soon the shadows left his face, and the love-light shone in his eyes. He crept out of bed, and opening the latticed window, looked up at the stars, and began to chant,—and this was the madman's prayer:

“O my Father, who sittest in heaven beside the great Fountain of Knowledge,—we are, both of us, now very tired and somewhat afraid of the darkness.

“We have heard the monotonous thunders that silence the voices of song-birds; our hearts are become as great vases, o'erflowing with cadence of sobbings.

“Thou knowest her heart's secret legend; perhaps Thou will rub out the writing, as Thou wipest the dew from the flowers, or tears from the eyes of the dying.

“And I, O my Father, went searching, amidst the far mazes of star-heights, for that which I now find was near me—too late, for behold! she is sleeping.

“O God, as the shadows have covered the travel-worn world with their mantle, perchance Thou will fashion her dreamings to mingle with mine in the silence.

“Let Thy Love and Thy Light be around us to deaden the noise of the thunders, and cause us to wake clearer-sighted to greet, hand in hand, the cool morning!”

Unperceived, there entered the chamber the sad-faced Angel of Death, whose garments are gray-hued and sombre, and whose touch can relieve the unhappy.

The boy felt a cool wind fan his cheek, and crept softly back to bed, so as not to awaken his loved one.

Before falling asleep he crushed the two pearls to atoms, so that their alluring beauty could cause no more misfortune.

And when the morrow dawned, it was for Korlyan a morrow indeed,—free from all longings and heart-aches, or blindfolded gropings for wisdom.

But in the house of the fisher was weeping.

770





LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00023157548